

## Work–Life Balance

*Jon Bywater*



Fig. 1  
Dan Arps  
*Explaining Things*  
2008  
Gambia Castle  
Auckland

“...the supreme value of the New and of innovation, as both modernism and modernization grasped it, fades away against a steady stream of momentum and variation...”

– Fredric Jameson, 1994<sup>1</sup>

“...chronic instability places in full view, during labor time as well as during free time, the naked *rules* which artificially structure the boundaries of action. ... to experience rules directly means also to recognize their conventionality and groundlessness. Thus, one is no longer immersed in a predefined ‘game’, participating therein with true allegiance. Instead, one catches a glimpse of oneself in individual ‘games’ which are destitute of all seriousness and obviousness, having become nothing more than a place for immediate *self-affirmation* – a self-affirmation which is all the more brutal and arrogant, in short, cynical, the more it draws upon, without illusions but with perfect momentary allegiance, those same rules which characterize conventionality and mutability.”

– Paolo Virno, 2004,<sup>2</sup>

“Work–life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to us – including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study.”

– Department of Labour Te Tari Mahi website, 2008.

Dan Arps' recent exhibitions dramatise a worst-case scenario for anyone who fears that contemporary art is at risk of becoming a hopelessly marginal and irrelevant activity. In part, through their titles, the gallery space is cast on different occasions as a bunker, a ranch and a dungeon, venues for escapist retreat. Windows are painted out, papered over and boarded up, physically blocking out the world outside. Upon entering, we face the potential embarrassment of walking in on what appears to be an interrupted and abandoned but nonetheless private space, whose contents appear as if unprepared for general viewing. Empty plastic bags, wisps of straw, newspaper, or a single, crushed beer can are left littering the floor. Chairs and tables are arrayed as if for 'small group activities' in the vicinity of self-help tapes and management diagrams. In these playrooms-come-hideouts, the crafted images and objects that take up the positions of paintings and sculptures are often associated with references to therapy. It is unclear who – the artist, the audience, or even gallery staff – might be here for self-improvement. Childishly crude gestures in paint and modeling materials mingle with tawdry mass cultural detritus and semi-literate expressions of crackpot ideas.

The self-deprecatory caricature of the enterprise that can be made out in Arps' work is obscured and complicated by the commitment evident first and most simply in its consistent public exhibition. In contradiction to the hermeticism his scenarios imply, the pleasures of these shows lie precisely in their vigorous and perceptive curiosity about other art and the rest of the world, and further, in the precision with which from one work to the next Arps hones an ability to highlight the intractable oddness of and interest in details of it. This familiar dynamic of consistency and refinement is one way to locate a sustaining momentum for his practice. In a typical inheritance from artistic modernism, formal and conceptual issues are trialed and resolved, reworked and recycled from exhibition to exhibition. In a way exemplary of much contemporary art, then, the originality of his work might be better understood at the level of a sensibility or aesthetic than at that of concept or form, and the newness of each development importantly relative to his own practice as much as it is to a wider discourse.

In attempting to articulate something of Arps' particular aesthetic and its emotional tonality, I would like to consider his work in relation to a general question raised by consumer capitalism's and artistic modernism's shared

valuation of newness. His work is filled with commercial goods and processes, frequently drawing on the impact of dated design or material from subcultures not usually at home in an art context. The way his work treats of the logics of artistic modernism and industrial or technological invention, then, makes it a pertinent case through which to revisit a deep pessimism about the effect of the convergence of their valuations: accepting that “the underlying condition of the original” may be “the ever-present reality of the copy,”<sup>3</sup> aesthetic effectiveness seems nonetheless tied in some way to newness. If this coincides with the market’s demand for novelty, is artistic invention merely another symptom of a hegemonic capitalist mode of production? By way of an answer, I hope to suggest how at the same time that it cynically parodies aspirations for art’s value, Arps’ work might all the more clearly evince one.

#### I.

Arps’ work sits within the broad swathe of sculptural possibilities that lie in activating the formal properties of materials equally with their connotative, acculturated art and non-art associations. Within this wide field, the particular strategies and style of Jessica Stockholder – who exemplarily extends Allan Kaprow and Robert Rauschenberg’s assemblage technique further into three dimensions on an architectural scale – and Isa Genzken – who extensively incorporates pre-fabricated commercial materials such as toys and posters in her assemblages and environments – serve as well as any as basic reference points for Arps’ work within the programmes of European and American museums.

Quite unlike Stockholder, though, Arps’ simultaneously literal and abstract deployment of materials draws together elements of expressionist and formalist abstraction with *objets trouvés* in collage and assemblage through a conceptual approach as much as a formal one. His exhibitions of the past four years – including *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* (The Physics Room, 2007), *Affirmation Dungeon* (Gambia Castle, 2007, and Jack The Pelican, 2008), *Motivation Bunker* (Neon Parc, 2008), *Fractal Tears* (Michael Lett, 2008), and *Explaining Things* (Gambia Castle, 2008 and Auckland Art Gallery, 2009), *The History of Christchurch, Part 1* (Artspace, 2010), *Charlie Sheen* (Y3K, 2011) – in various ways cast the gallery space as some kind of refuge or place of internment, within which exist elements that are intended to function independently as individual paintings and sculptures, often distinguished by quite conventional forms,

including wall works and free-standing objects.

In *Explaining Things* (fig. 1), for example, a found, handwritten text appended to the gallery door, while a work in itself, also suggests a narrative reason for the boarded-up gallery windows, and so an implied situation within which to consider the other elements of the installation:

DARREN,  
THIS PLACE  
IS UNDER  
POLICE  
SERVAILANCE  
ENTER AT  
YOUR OWN  
PERIL. HOPFULLY  
ILL BE HERE WE  
CAN TALK.

Similarly, a simple bed made up on the floor under the windows in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* suggests the invisible presence of at least one actor that may or may not be distinct from the author of the other objects in the room. More theatrically, certain points in the room are under surveillance by a closed-circuit video, playing on a small black-and-white monitor. Arps' conceits take up a possibility prominently enacted by Marcel Broodthaers' classic late work, *Décor: A Conquest* (ICA, 1975), in which the presence of studio lighting implies the status of the work as a set. Indeed, in *Explaining Things* a set of slightly broken outdoor furniture might allude obliquely to Broodthaers' in that piece.

This scenographic presentation finds a precedent in art made in Aotearoa / New Zealand in the implicitly inhabited environments of works by L. Budd and et al., such as *Simultaneous Invalidations, Second Attempt* (Artspace, 2004) with its camp stretcher in a sideroom off the main gallery. Where the et al. collective's authorship is deliberately ambiguous, the stagings Arps authors often give a sense of plural points of view or multiple voices. Even without someone apparently sleeping on the floor, the simultaneous deployment of a number of visual languages establishes a novelistic heteroglossia that is a key feature of his work.

Readymades of the most banal and barely manipulated kind – sheets of newspaper slumped not quite flat on the floor of one room in *Affirmation Dungeon*, for example, in the style of Paul Thek – contrast with collages and over-painting on commercial prints and mass-produced ornaments. Expulsive, expressionist gestures in paint and modeling clay are applied to slickly moulded and Photoshopped commercial products. These include, of course, images and objects made by other authors, but also evoke clearly-defined genres, including science fiction, fantasy art, pornography and advertising, that also contribute to the plurality of sets of conventions in play.

Unified as they often are within a single, if opaque, narrative by Arps' titles and other cues, our awareness of the elements of his installations doubles. While the more conventionally-crafted elements appear both as paintings and sculptures and as conceptualist props in the roles of those things, the deadpan found objects also read as careful formal gestures, albeit of a frequently nonchalant kind. In *Fractal Tears*, for example, a dirty white plastic coathanger suspended on a string is conspicuous as a new element in Arps' repertoire of objects to someone following his practice, and so draws attention to itself as a kind of sculptural mobile, at the same time that it appears as simply an exceptionally ugly, disposable variation on a familiar practical form (fig. 2).



Fig. 2  
Dan Arps  
*Fractal Tears*  
2008  
Michael Lett  
Auckland

The use of such simple, everyday objects often seems to follow an intuitive, site-specific logic. As a former member of the Gambia Castle gallery collective, he shares concerns with several of his peers in activating formal effects that both draw on and de-literalise commercial imagery and forms at the same time as responding to the characteristics of the display space. Tahī Moore's work, for example, like Arps', has developed the tropes of the empty drink bottle and the object leaned against the wall. Writing about *Affirmation Dungeon* (Gambia Castle, 2007), Moore articulated his own take on intuitive decisions involved in specific installations. When it comes to accounting for the role of the physical space in the work, he expressed himself paradoxically: "It's this feeling of entering a room and there's a room, which describes the feeling of another space." "There's a lot going on when there's not much there..."<sup>4</sup>

Even at its most apparently haphazard or casual, the non-standard arrangement of components contributes to a sense of scrutiny that these

formal strategies bring to the components of Arps' shows. This effect is overdetermined by the character of the fictional set ups and of many of found materials used that – in another way and perhaps more obviously –bring into question the status especially of Arps' ostensibly abstract and expressionist works, associating them with the abject and ordinary. As so far only noted in passing, the damaged and discarded, paranoia, fantasy and therapy are recurrent references in the work.

In *Gestapo Pussy Ranch*, the overpainted commercial posters on the walls include soft porn and science fiction imagery. A circle of chairs in one corner provides a space to listen to a self-help cassette for parents on the subject of adjusting to children leaving home, and a collapsible picnic table marked with an A4 printout offering 'outreach'<sup>5</sup> holds amongst its contents a piece of cack-handed canework, the exemplary craft form of the sheltered workshop. In *Explaining Things*, the furniture offers a place from which to view a grainy video compilation of internet-sourced material on astral travel and other New Age spiritualism. The note to Darren, then, is only one among many details that establish a sense of the gallery as a refuge for some marginal or eccentric activity.

The large silver form that dominates the room in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* debuted at Michael Lett in a 2007 group show under the title *Panax*. On the one hand it looks like a homemade and mangled stand-in for Ronald Bladen's minimalist benchmarks *The Cathedral Evening* (1969) or *Three Elements* (1965), recently exhibited together at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. On another, it is like a cover version of American artist Eric Wesley's less well-known *PYC Corporate Icon* (2004), as illustrated at the time in *Flash Art*. In either case, its D.I.Y. finish and science fiction overtones make it, as critic David Levinson wrote, "...analogous to an unconvincing prop – with the thing it's imitating being modern art."<sup>6</sup> Its homemade look suggests fandom. Formalist art making, the implication seems to be, is a geeky and weird, perhaps lonely activity.

In *Fractal Tears*, old works of Arps' turn up broken and overpainted, titled as "therapy objects" (fig. 3). These complex, formless lumps – akin perhaps to – Franz West's "Passsstücke" ('prostheses' or 'adaptives') – are presented on actual plinths and plinth-like inverted stools that stage the failure of high modernist formalism's attempt to remove itself from the human



Fig. 3  
Dan Arps  
*Fractal Tears*  
(Therapy Object)  
2008  
Michael Lett  
Auckland

lifeworld while acknowledging, and recuperating, its underlying fascinations. Importantly, the expressionist qualities of these abstract moments are more than simply quoted, formally rigorous according to a nuanced personal aesthetic of the artist's, yet hold in reserve another life as a sign for themselves. They embody a selfconsciousness about the meaning of their form as identifiably art-like.

As well as modelling the pluralistic character of general visual experience, the mixing of conceptualist and expressionist gestures within Arps' work also appears as a way of coping with the contemporary problem of negotiating an art practice with the potentially overwhelming awareness of other people's work and of possibilities for art. The Physics Room *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* press release suggests that that show's the titular reference to the secret police of the Third Reich might be "...more emblematic of the tyranny of influence than actual ... Nazis."<sup>7</sup> The relationship of the work to other practices positions the artist as a consumer of information under conditions where the modernist myth of originality or absolute newness has been dispelled, in part simply by the increasing availability of information. The provocatively hyperbolic formulations of Jean Baudrillard's classic diagnosis that perform as well as describe an "ecstasy of communication" chime with Arps' sometimes chaotic-seeming embrace of often relatively novel mass-cultural items in an art context.

Writing even before the popular uptake of the Internet, Baudrillard characterised this emergent condition as involving "...a whole pornography of information and communication, that is to say, of circuits and networks, a pornography of all functions and objects in their readability, their fluidity, their availability, their regulation, in their forced signification, in their performativity, in their branching, in their polyvalence, in their free expression..."<sup>8</sup>

How then does the kind of 'newness' I have begun to evoke in Arps' practice – its continuity with and distinction from other practices, and the systems it sets up within which it can refine the experience it offers as it progresses – function within this postmodern condition? I will return now in more detail to the gloomy diagnosis that all newness is reducible to the alienating momentum of capitalism.

## II

The coincidence between consumer capitalism's and artistic modernism's common concern for 'making it new' has long been noted. American Imagist poet John Gould Fletcher's parodic review of the text of a magazine advertisement joked in 1915 that the market's "best-paid, least rewarded" creatives seemed to be "getting quite up-to-date."<sup>9</sup> Theorising the convergent logics of aesthetics and the market, critics have tended to be pessimistic about the potential of avant-garde artistic production to be anything but complicit with capital. Seeing art in terms of the industrial mode of production, for example, Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno classically relegates its search for newness to a function of its commodity status:

*"Nouveauté* [newness] is aesthetically the result of historical development, the trademark of consumer goods appropriated by art by means of which artworks distinguish themselves from the ever-same inventory in obedience to the need for the exploitation of capital, which, if it does not expand, if it does not – in its own language – offer something new, is eclipsed. The new is the aesthetic seal of expanded reproduction, with its promise of undiminished plenitude..."

Adorno continues by noting that "[a]rt is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of mute reality, does art become eloquent; this is why art no longer tolerates the innocuous."<sup>10</sup> Yet the aesthetic techniques historically deployed to reflect this hardness and alienation, often originally in intentional resistance to capitalism – collage, irony, novelty – are commonly recognised in this critical tradition to have become hallmarks of mass-market capitalism. The market has come to appear happy to accept any kind of art production with a commitment to radicalism, rule-breaking and newness. In his review of artistic modernism's legacy, British theorist Raymond Williams elaborates Fletcher's link between the avant-garde and advertising:

"What has quite rapidly happened is that Modernism quickly lost its anti-bourgeois stance, and achieved comfortable integration into the new international capitalism. Its attempt at a universal market, transfrontier and transclass, turned out to be spurious. Its forms lent themselves to cultural competition and the commercial interplay of obsolescence,



with its shifts of schools, styles and fashion so essential to the market. The painfully acquired techniques of significant disconnection are relocated, with the help of the special insensitivity of the trained and assured technicians, as the merely technical modes of advertising and the commercial cinema. The isolated, estranged images of alienation and loss, the narrative discontinuities, have become the easy iconography of the commercials, and the lonely, bitter, sardonic and skeptical hero takes his ready-made place as star of the thriller.”<sup>11</sup>

Writing that these formal inventions “have become the new but fixed forms of our present moment”<sup>12</sup> Williams preempts the way American critic and Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson cites the coincident artistic and commercial valuations of newness as a key antimony of the post modern condition. The theoretical puzzle for those concerned with understanding a way ahead, as he sees it, is in thinking a way past a stream of newness that is structured around now wholly commodified ‘seasons’, now that aesthetics align with capitalism; fashion, for him, being an exemplary case of newness reduced to novelty:

“...It is as if the logic of fashion had, accompanying the multifarious penetration of its omnipresent images, begun to bind and identify itself with the social and psychic fabric in some ultimately inextricable way, which tends to make it over into the very logic of our system as a whole.”<sup>13</sup>

He concludes that this leaves an apparent impossibility of systemic change, as all innovation seems inevitably internal to the capitalist process:

“The experience and the value of perpetual change thereby comes to govern language and feelings, fully as much as the garments of this particular society, to the point at which ... the supreme value of the New and of innovation, as both modernism and modernization grasped it, fades away against a steady stream of momentum and variation that at some outer limit seems stable and motionless.”<sup>14</sup>

Giorgio Agamben’s work to refresh an understanding of politics includes the proposal that we look to the realm of aesthetics – understood as it has become in Western culture as something disconnected from instrumental aims – as

the site of the political. He posits that “...the sphere of gestures or pure means (that is, the sphere of those means that emancipate themselves from their relation to an end while still remaining means) ... as the proper sphere of politics,” and “Politics is the sphere of pure means, that is, of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings.”<sup>16</sup>

A clear implication is one readily understood by those with an investment in aesthetics: that style matters, that tone and ethos are often the most important measures of the ethical and political. Agamben’s “sphere of gestures” might be usefully taken to approximate that personal aesthetic that is both the ‘newness’ of Arps’ work – its difference and identity within the field of contemporary art – and the variations within its self-defining parameters, its internal ‘newness’ that sustains the work as a means emancipated from a defined end.

Taking Agamben’s hypothesis to the account of Arps’ work I have so far given, there is a coincidence between his scenography and Agamben’s use of cinema as a locus of the gestural: “Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture. ... The duty of the director is to introduce into this dream the element of waking.”<sup>17</sup>

In these terms, the way Arps might hope to ‘wake’ his audience is through referencing the spectacularised and commercialised disciplines of emotional, erotic and workplace life, for example, highlighting and de-naturalising their aesthetics within his own. The essence of Arps’ gesture lies in the continuity between the deployment of readymade materials and the conventionally expressive gestures – indulgent, lazy, childish, not craft-intensive, sometimes appearing like defacements – in which a consistent tone is one that frees effort from the effortful, the un-laboured.

Seen in this light, Arps’ work consistently asserts an alternative kind of seriousness to that evinced by permanent materials, high production values, big budgets or labour-intensiveness. Against these standard measures of commitment, he presents the formal successes of vigor and casualness, a lack of preciousness, effects that compete with the power of the appeals of the popular work they sometimes overpaint.

Gesture, then, while clearly set out for us in the hand-manipulated materials – the marks and moulding of painted and sculpted elements – obtains also and equally in the rest of the work that frames them. As gesture in Agamben's terms, at the same time Arps' work is in fact a commodity and participates in fashion, it demonstrates one way in which the legacy of modernist art – and the way a practice can make newness something relative to its own open-ended terms – can exceed reduction to product, and so a way past the conclusion that commodity capitalism has achieved cultural hegemony over any artistic counterdiscourse.

### III

Returning to Baudrillard's description of the postmodern, Arps' shows notably allude to and include actual pornography, from the aerobics-and-airbrush sculpted soft porn of the 'Got Sex?' poster inverted and overpainted on the wall and the camera trained on the bed in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch*, to the more confronting, simple corrugated-cardboard-backed collage of downloaded images of people engaged in sex acts with an actor costumed and made up as the Spielberg character E.T. included in *Explaining Things*. Here, most explicitly, Arps highlights human desires for some kind of connection or transcendence, and the aesthetic strangeness of mass culture's (commercial) responses to them. Here a general emotional tonality of Arps' work can be made out.

Arps' and Gwynneth Porter's text in the *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* catalogue incorporates a collage of found texts with confessional first-person accounts. It narrates a childhood experience of pornography and an adult experience of alienated sex<sup>18</sup> that vividly echo the detachment in the encounter with the pornographic material offered in the work. It provides us with something like the child's uncomprehending sense of something strange and powerful or a view from outside a state of arousal or the sadness of desire. The blatantly erotic, undermined in this way, contributes to a tone that has an element of the tragic. The frailty of understanding and the vulnerability of investments of value and meaning, in art and mass culture equally, are underscored. The title *Fractal Tears* connects this sense of sorrow with the popular-science sublime of fractal imagery. The computer-aided, kitsch complexity of the 'magic eye' posters that form the bases of collages in *Motivation Bunker* are also disrupted, their promised secrets un-seeable (fig. 4).

In *Fractal Tears*, Arps uses a kitchen poster that display a selection of cheeses in just such a state of glossy explicitness, a readymade still life, collaged with Google image search-type photographs of home crafts, at the other end of a spectrum of publicly acceptable appearances. Literally and empirically, Frederick Kaufman argues that pornography has influenced food photography: “Like sex porn, gastroporn addresses the most basic human needs and functions, idealizing and degrading them at the same time.”<sup>19</sup>

The suggestion of surveillance noted in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* and *Explaining Things* stages a version of the ready availability of visual information, and the way that “secrets, spaces and scenes [are] abolished in a single dimension of information”; the dissolution of the private that Baudrillard, in fact, sees as productive of “obscenity.”<sup>20</sup> Arps’ fictions of an invaded private space further intensify this sense of the obscene, bringing the readability of all the ‘information’ his work draws in into question.

The title *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* condenses several discernable thematics. Appropriated from the Bret Easton Ellis’s novel *The Informers* (1994) – in which it is a title of a pornographic work overseen by one of the characters on a shelf in someone else’s house<sup>21</sup> – it reflects the role of the obviously transgressive signifiers of Nazism, and its associations with discipline and cruelty, in mainstream sexual fantasies of bondage and discipline. Questions of agency and responsibility, discipline and control, are bound up with the pornographic.

In Arps’ titles, ‘motivation’ and ‘affirmation’ are concepts signed by the Californian-style self-help movement and its pop psychology. The term ‘dungeon’ invokes sado-masochist playful discipline, a premises where one might be restrained and forcibly affirmed, by one’s own arrangement. Here we encounter a parodic reflection of how the world compels us to conform in our emotions. The invitation / poster for *Affirmation Dungeon* (Gambia Castle) pictures an alien brandishing a phallus, riding on the back of a fire-breathing dragon standing on the globe, who in a speech bubble commands us to “THINK POSITIVE.”

Actual self-help materials presented by Arps confront us with technologies developed to profit from our basest human needs. In this world of therapy



Fig. 4  
Dan Arps  
*Motivation Bunker*  
2008  
Neon Parc  
Melbourne

we might find the “forced extroversion of all interiority”<sup>22</sup> important to Baudrillard’s “obscenity,” an example of a potential cause of “the depression-bummer laid on [the psyche] by the by the world of compulsory activities and participation.”<sup>23</sup> As the press release for *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* puts it, in shows like that one, “the tweakiness of our totally high capitalist delirium finds itself channelled with all the hyper-lucidity of the depressed.”

Business culture is another theme of Arps’ work. Amongst the caffeinated eclecticism – empty 1.5 litre bottles of the caffeine-heavy softdrink Mountain Dew have become a motif – a single A4 sheet of copy paper, laser printed with a diagram setting out the structure of management process, taped to the gallery wall in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch*, sets out the structure of a process with boggling emptiness in a congruently banal desktop publishing aesthetic: one step leading to another step, and an arrow returning us to the first. Alongside New Age truisms, the aesthetics of mainstream capitalism’s day-to-day discipline is shown as another form of commodified knowledge.

Paolo Virno deduces that *self*-affirmation becomes a necessity under current unstable conditions of work and leisure. Positing cynicism as a key feature of “the emotional situation in which the contemporary multitude finds itself,” he emphasises that he does not mean to refer “to a cluster of psychological tendencies, but to ways of being and feeling so pervasive that they end up being common to the most diverse contexts of experience.”<sup>24</sup> The awareness of the “conventionality and groundlessness” of rules that determines this cynicism might apply equally to participation in art, indeed artistic tradition, or wage labour. As it flickers between dry humour and the tragic, Arps’ work, then, might express an exemplary cynicism. The dimension in which it is defined by its own aesthetic makes it in Virno’s sense self-affirming, but moreover its simultaneous activation of multiple sets of visual cultural conventions or “games” (as partly enumerated in section one) performs the “conventionality and mutability” he describes in our allegiance to any.

In *Explaining Things* a framed poster of female model posing as a golfer in short shorts, wrinkled and browned from water staining, is collaged with another found object blocking out the face of the figure, a hand-drawn sketch, including the words “promotional marketing concepts” feebly rendered as an acronymic logo. In this detail, for example, once again we view something not

intended for public consumption – a rough note-to-self, a draft. Arps quietly sounds a resonance of the fiction of the gallery as an abandoned private space, of the sense that we may never have been intended to understand or even see these things.

On the wall of *Explaining Things*, a smudge of purple oil paint on marks a print of Pacific palms. On a plinth an expressively daubed and wrapped crystal shop sculpture (an owl perching over a glass globe of the sort where electrical discharge will play its miniature lightning to the movement of your fingertip). The combination of popular art with precise but untechnical facture contrasts individual agency and objects of passive consumption. The aesthetic success of these modifications in Arps' practice's own terms asserts fundamentally a value in individual expression. To return to Baudrillard's words, the individual subject is re-attributed with an agency, and so exceeds the role of the "a pure screen, a pure absorption and re-absorption surface of the influent networks"<sup>25</sup> to become actively responsive to the surrounding flows.

Arps' work surfaces a repressed fate for commercial products and processes – from popular art to human resources management – and in making them strange in this way, brings into question the ways they offer us of explaining or otherwise engaging with the world. His aesthetic reactivates the possibility of rejecting the pressures that a capitalist mode of production enforces, potentially unsettling our sense and so opening up a space for us to question the very things that might seem the most sensible, professional or authorised. In its clear-sighted cynicism about itself and the world, the work parodies yet also *makes* an individual expression, critically asserting the value of such beyond and within the frames of artistic tradition and commerce.

1. Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.17.
2. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004, p.87.
3. Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-garde" in *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985, p.162.
4. Tahi Moore, "Dan Arps: Affirmation Dungeon", *The Delivery: Exhibitions 2007*, Auckland: Gambia Castle Press, 2008, unpaginated.
5. Cf. the pagework "Outreach" in *Natural Selection* 6, pp.2.1-2.5.
6. David Levinson, "Watch the Skies", *NZ Listener*, vol. 210, no. 3514, 15-21 September 2007 [accessed from [http://www.nzlistener.co.nz/issue/3514/artsbooks/9608/watch\\_the\\_skies.html](http://www.nzlistener.co.nz/issue/3514/artsbooks/9608/watch_the_skies.html), 11/08].
7. The Physics Room, "Gestapo Pussy Ranch – Dan Arps" (press release), Christchurch: The Physics Room, 2007 [accessed from <http://www.physicsroom.org.nz/gallery/2007/arps/>, 11/2008].
8. Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, (*Autre par lui-même* (1983), ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Bernard and Caroline Schutze, New York: Autonomedia, 1988, pp.130-131.
9. John Gould Fletcher, "Vers Libre and Advertisements" in *The Little Review*, vol. 11, no. 2 (April 1915), reprinted in ed. Steven Matthews, *Modernism: a Sourcebook*, Houndmills, UK, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008, pp.219-220.
10. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p.21
11. Fletcher, p.35.
12. Williams, Raymond, "When Was Modernism?", *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney, New York: Verso, 1989 (pp.31-35), p.35.
13. Jameson, p.17.
14. Ibid.
15. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p.60.
16. Ibid., p.56.
17. Dan Arps and Gwynneth Porter, "What is A Well-dressed Teenager? By Scotty" in *Sun Seeker*, Auckland: Clouds, Christchurch: The Physics Room, and Melbourne: Neon Parc, 2008, pp.5-6.
18. Frank Kaufman, "Debbie Does Salad: The Food Network at the Frontiers of Pornography" in *Harper's Magazine*, October 2005 (pp.55-60), p.57.
19. Baudrillard, p.131.
20. Arps and Porter, p.16.
21. Baudrillard, p.132.
22. Arps and Porter, p.4.
23. Virno, p.84.
24. Baudrillard, p.27.